

STARTLING! NO. 2828

A SERMON
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*“And Hazael said, Why weepeth my lord? And he answered,
 Because I know the evil that thou wilt do unto the children of Israel....And Hazael said,
 But what, is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?”
 2 Kings 8:12-13*

I SUPPOSE that none of us can doubt that Hazael acted with perfect freedom when he became the murderer of his master. No one, surely, would dare to suggest that any constraint was put upon him. The glittering prospect of wearing the crown of Syria was before his eyes. Nothing stood between him and the kingdom but the life of his master. That master lies sick of a fever. A wet cloth is the usual remedy. He has but to select one that shall be thicker than usual, and take care, in spreading it over his face, to place it so that the man is suffocated, and lo! he comes to the throne.

What wonder is it that Hazael easily puts his master out of the way, and then mounts the vacant seat? None of us will imagine for a moment that he was under constraint unless it was Satanic, and yet, while he acted as a free agent, is it not quite clear that God foreknew what he would do, and that it was perfectly certain that he would destroy his master? The prophet speaks not as one who hazarded a conjecture. He foresaw the event with absolute certainty, yet did Hazael act with perfect freedom when he went and fulfilled the prophecy of Elisha.

I believe, my brethren, that it is quite as easy to see how God's predestination and man's responsibility are perfectly compatible, as it is to see how divine foreknowledge and human free agency are consistent with one another. Does not the very fact of foreknowledge imply a certainty? Is not that which is foreknown certain? Is not the fact sure to be when God foreknows that it will be? How could it be foreknown conditionally? How could it be foretold conditionally?

In this instance, there was no stipulation or contingency whatever. It was absolutely foretold that Hazael would be king of Syria. The prophet knew the fact right well, and he clearly descried the means, else why should he look into Hazael's face, and weep? God foreknew the mischief that he would do when he came to the throne, yet that foreknowledge did not in the least degree interfere with his free agency.

Nor is this an isolated and exceptional case. The facts most surely believed among us, like the doctrines most clearly revealed to us, point all of them to the same inference. The predestination of God does not destroy the free agency of man, or lighten the responsibility of the sinner. It is true, in the matter of salvation, when God comes to save, his free grace prevails over our free agency, and leads the will in glorious captivity to the obedience of faith.

But in sinning, man is free—free in the widest sense of the term, never being compelled to do any evil deed, but being left to follow the turbulent passions of his own corrupt heart, and carry out the prevailing tendencies of his own depraved nature.

In reference to this matter of predestination and free will, I have often heard men ask, “How do you make them agree?” I think there is another question just as difficult to solve, “How can you make them differ?” The two may be as easily made to concur as to clash. It seems to me a problem which cannot be stated, and a subject that needs no solution. It is but a difficulty which we surmise, and theoretical dilemmas are always hard to deal with, and difficult to disentangle.

When we look at matters of fact, the mist that clouds our understanding vanishes. We see God predestinating and man premeditating, God knowing fully, yet man acting freely, God ordaining every circumstance, yet man maneuvering to compass his own projects, in short, we see man accurately, but unconsciously, fulfilling all which was written in the wisdom of God, and that without any impetus of the Almighty upon his mind constraining or inciting him to do so.

You will observe, in this chapter, three or four distinct instances in which both the foreknowledge and foreordination of God are distinctly proven, and yet, at the same time, the free agency of the creature is conspicuously set forth. That point, however, I have merely adverted to by way of introduction. My subject, on this occasion, as more immediately suggested by the words before us, is the common and too often fatal ignorance of men as to the wickedness of their own hearts.

I. LET US EXPOSE AND EXPOUND THIS IGNORANCE.

Our ignorance of the depravity of our own hearts is a startling fact. Hazael did not believe that he was bad enough to do any of the things here anticipated. "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?" He might have been conscious enough that his heart was not so pure but it might consent to do many an evil thing, yet crimes so flagrant as those the prophet had foretold of him, he thought himself quite incapable of committing. He could not believe that such wanton cruelty lurked in his breast, or that such barbarity towards women and children could be perpetrated with his sanction. Not yet, perhaps, was the ambition that aspired to the throne of Syria, or the treachery that issued in the murder of his master, fully ripe.

Ah, my brethren, the ignorance of Hazael is ours to a greater or lesser degree! In our natural state, we are oblivious of the depravity of our own hearts. How commonly we hear men deny that their hearts are depraved! They tell us that though man be a little injured by the fall, he is still a noble creature. His high and glorious instincts make amends they would persuade us, for his low and beggarly vices. Such foolish conceits we impute to ignorance.

Men account crimes revolting when they hear of their comrades being convicted of committing them, but they do not know the innate plague of their own heart. They have not yet learned that their own heart is base and depraved. Hence they challenge the doctrine when we state it—because they are unconscious of the fact.

We do not expect a man to accept it as an axiom merely upon our testimony. He had need have some experience himself before he will be able to lay hold upon a truth so humbling, so self-abasing, as that of total depravity. The baseness of our hearts has barely dawned on our apprehension, though we have a faint gleam of suspicion as to our real condition. Conscience is sensitive enough to let us know that all is not quite right. We feel that we are not pure, that we are not completely perfect. We admit that we make some mistakes, though we set them down to weakness rather than willfulness, we apologize for our infirmities, and rather excuse than accuse our own hearts.

Most of us, however, I trust, have enough light to discern that there was something willfully wrong with our hearts before the Spirit of Christ began to deal with us. We would frankly and freely confess that we were not all that we desired to be, that there was some radical evil that defied our capacity to search it out. Ah, but how pale was that gleam! It was mere starlight in the soul—not like the sunlight which has since shone in, and shown us the blackness of our nature.

We were ignorant, then, of the fact that our nature was totally corrupt, we did not know that it was essentially tainted with iniquity, we could not have endorsed that saying of the apostle, "The carnal mind is enmity against God, and is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be." We could hardly understand it, when we heard the Christian minister say that the old nature was positively irreclaimable, and must be crucified with its affections and lusts, and that a new nature must be given to us.

If we ever heard a preacher speak of the fountains of the great deep of our evil heart being broken up, we thought he exaggerated, at least we said, "Surely this might be true of some notorious criminals, or it might be even alleged of some ill-bred people who had seen an ill example from their youth up," but we could not imagine that this was actually the case with ourselves.

Ay, but my brethren, we were, to a great degree, cured of this ignorance when the Spirit of God brought us under conviction. Oh, what a view of ourselves He then gave to some of us! I think we could say, with Bunyan, that we thought the most loathsome toad in the world to be a better creature than ourselves. We have been led, when under conviction of sin, to sigh and wish we had been made a viper, or some reptile that men would tread upon and crush, rather than that we should have been such base, such vile, hell-deserving sinners as we felt ourselves to be.

No discourse, then, about human dignity could have pleased us, it would have been rubbing salt into our sore to have told us that man was by birth a pure and noble creature. In vain might they have attempted to persuade us then that, though we were a little awry, a diligent pursuit of some orthodox plan or prescription might easily restore us, and lift us up from the position into which we had been cast by Adam and by our sin. No, we felt that divine grace must new-make us, that there must be a supernatural work wrought in such beings as we were, or else, surely, we never could be fit to stand before the face of God, and see Him with joy, and greet Him with acceptance.

Thus, I say, brethren, that much of our ignorance was taken away, but alas! how much remained! We did not know even then how depraved we were. When Sinai's lightnings were flashing abroad, and all our hearts seemed lit up with its dread fire, that lurid flame was not bright enough to show us all our baseness. While we stood trembling there, and the law was thundering over our heads, we bowed to the very dust, but we did not cower even then, as we ought to have done, in penitent humiliation. We were rather awed than melted, for we had only just begun to decipher the black letters of that volume of our total depravity.

We knew more about our moral obliquity afterwards, when Jesus came to us, and by His sweet love, bade us be of good cheer, for our sins, which were many, were all forgiven. Oh, how we saw the baseness of sin as we had never seen it before, for we now saw it in the light of His countenance. The love of His eyes flashed a brighter light into our hearts than all the lightnings of Mount Paran. Horeb's burning steep never gave us such illuminations as did Calvary's hallowed summit.

Calvary might be the lesser height, it may not have seemed to stand out with such majesty and awe, but it exerted greater power over us. In its tender flush of mellow light, our eyes could see more clearly than in all the fitful flashes that had scared us hitherto. I think we saw, then, to as full an extent as it was possible for us to bear, how vile, how desperately evil was our nature! When we perceived how great must be the sacrifice which, by its virtue, could atone for sin, how vast that price of our Redeemer's blood, which only could provide a ransom from the fall, we had lessons once for all taught us, never to be forgotten.

And yet, since then, I think we have learned more of the evil of our own hearts than we could at first apprehend. We said, then, "Surely, now I have come into the innermost chamber of iniquity," but often, since that day, has the Spirit said to us, "Son of man, I will show thee greater abominations than these," and we have been led to see, in the light of God's continual mercies, His perpetual faithfulness, His unfailing love—we have been led to view, in that light, our continued wanderings, our idolatries of heart, our murmurings, our pride, and our lusts, and we have found ourselves to be worse than we thought we were.

I appeal to you, Christian men and women, if anyone had told you that you would have loved your Savior so little as you have done, if any prophet had told you, in the hour of your conversion, that you would have served Christ as feebly as you have done, would you have believed it? I appeal to you from the dew of your youth, from that morning blush of your soul's unclouded joy, if an angel from heaven had said to you, "You will doubt your God, you will murmur against His providence, you will kick at the dispensations of His grace," would you not have replied, "Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this evil thing?" Your experience, I am sure, has taught you that you were not aware, when you put on your harness, how much of a dastard was the soldier who then did gird himself for the battle.

But mark this, we none of us know, after all, much of the baseness of our hearts. Some of you may have had more drilling in it than others have had, you may have made proof of it by sad backsliding,

your lusts may have outwardly betrayed their inward vigor, you may have been discarded by the Holy Ghost for a little season that the Lord might show you that you were weak as other men, that He might prove to you the hollowness of all your self-confidence, and wean you from all trust in your own integrity, but the most sorely exercised among you have not learned this lesson fully yet.

God only knows the vileness of the human heart. There is a depth beneath, a hidden spring, into which we cannot pry. In that lower depth, there is a still deeper abyss of positive corruption which we need not wish to fathom. God grant that we may know enough of this to humble us, and keep us ever low before Him! Yet hold, Lord, lest we should yield to despair, and absolutely lie down to die under the black thought of our alienation from righteousness, our naturalization in sin, and the deplorable tendency of our heart to rebel more and more against You, the faithful and true God! Show us not all our wretchedness.

As for the most of us, who cannot talk of this experience, let us not think ourselves doctors of divinity, let us sit down at once on the lowest form of the divine school. We have only begun to know ourselves in part, albeit we do know something of the Savior, blessed be His name! That something is exceedingly precious. Yet how much more there is for us to learn! We have hardly begun to sail on that unfathomable sea. We have not yet dived into its depths. We know not its marvelous lengths and breadths.

I have often been startled—and if any should say, jeeringly, “The preacher speaketh by experience,” they may—I have often been startled when I have found in my heart the *possibilities* of iniquity of which I thought I never could have been the subject, in reveries by day or in dreams of the night. All at once, a blasphemy, foul as hell has started up in the very middle of offering a prayer so earnest that my heart never knew more fervor. I have been staggered at myself.

When God has called us into the pulpit—we thought, at one time, we never could be proud if God so honored us—this has seemed to quicken our step in the black march of our depraved heart. Or when a little cast down and troubled in spirit, we have wished to leave the world altogether, and have been like Jonah, trying to flee to Tarshish that we might not go to this great Nineveh at our Lord’s bidding. Little did wereck that there was such cowardice in our soul. We have thus found out another phase in our own nature.

Does any man imagine that his heart is not vile? If he is a professing Christian, I much suspect whether he ought not to renounce his profession, for I think, any enlightened man, who sincerely looks to himself, and whose experience leads him somewhat to look within, will surely find, not mere foibles, but foulness that literally staggers him. I question the Christianity of that man who doubts whether there are, in his soul, the remains of such corruption as drown the ungodly in perdition, or whether, though a quickened child of God, he has another law in his members, warring against the law of his mind.

What! has he no such battle within that the things he would do he often does not, while the things that he would not do he often does? Has he no need to be in constant prayer to God to deliver him from the evil in his heart that he may be more than a conqueror over it at last?

I do assert, once more, and I think the experience of God’s children bears me out, that, when we shall be most advanced, and when we come, at last, to sit down in God’s kingdom above, we shall find that we have not learned all that there is to be learned of the foulness of our nature, and the desperateness of our soul’s disease.

“The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds and bruises, and putrefying sores.” “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked; who can know it?” “Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” “Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Perhaps, if we knew more of this terrible evil, it might imperil our reason. Hardly could it be possible for us to bear the full discovery and live. Among the wise concealments of God, is that which hides from open view the depravity of our heart, and the corruption of our nature.

II. But now I turn to THE PRACTICAL USE OF OUR SUBJECT, looking at it in two ways—*what it forbids*, and *what it suggests*.

The depravity of our nature forbids, first of all, *a venturing or presuming to play and toy with temptation*. When a Christian asks, “May I go into such a place?”—should he parley thus with himself! “True, temptation is very strong there, but I shall not yield. It would be dangerous to another man, but it is safe to me. If I were younger, or less prudent and circumspect, I might be in jeopardy, but I have passed the days of youthful passion. I have learned by experience to be more expert, I think, therefore, that I may venture to plunge, and hope to swim where younger men have been carried away by the tide, and less stable ones have been drowned.”

All such talking as this comes of evil, and genders evil. Proud flesh vaunts its purity, and becomes a prey to every vice. This is the conception of iniquity, only let it be nourished, and it will soon bring forth in hideous form every development of sin. He who carries gunpowder about him had better not stand where there are many sparks, he whose limbs are out of joint is in danger of falling every moment, and he had better not trust himself to walk on the edge of a precipice.

Let those who feel themselves to be of a peculiarly sensitive constitution not venture into a place where disease is rife. If I knew my lungs to be weak, and liable to congestion, I should shrink from foul air and any vicious atmosphere. If you know that your heart has certain proclivities to sin, why go and tempt the devil to take advantage of you? Satan will surprise you often enough, why then should you borrow fuel from his forge for your own destruction? Why will you go forth to meet him instead of trying with all vigilance to elude his insidious attacks? You have quite enough temptation already.

It is an evil thing for God’s people when they leave their proper quarters, and visit the localities where sin abounds. Were you an angel, were you sure you could never fall, then you might securely pitch your tent in the pestilential swamp, or frequent the haunts of sensual attraction, whose house is the way to hell, going down to the chambers of death, without apprehension of harm. But you are so prone to evil, so susceptible of contagion, that I warn you not to trifle with it.

Were you hard as adamant, your duty would still be to keep out of the way of temptation, to go as far as possible from the forbidden tree of the knowledge of good and evil. But you are not as strong as adamant, you are a creature whose moral power is weak, whose bias to evil is extreme, I implore you, therefore, as you would honor your God, and stand in His brightness, not to not go where the temptation to sin is glaring, and flatter yourself that you will come out guileless.

There are some of us who are such poor soldiers that I think if we had our choice, we would rather be where there was the least danger. It is right for some brave men, when duty calls, to go into the thickest of the battle, but every Christian is not meant to be in the front rank.

There are some men who have to deal with great sins, who are to seek to pluck sinners as brands from the burning. There are those who, like the physician, must go into the midst of the plague, that they may try to save such as are smitten with it. Some men’s calling necessarily demands that they should be in the midst of sin, yet they have need to keep a special guard over themselves, lest, while they seek to pluck others from the fire, they be like Nebuchadnezzar’s men, who, in going near the furnace, were themselves burned. Let them take heed then, to themselves, who seek to take care for others.

In some of those charitable missions in which you, my dear brethren in the church, are daily engaged, take care lest you yourselves, exposed to temptation, should so slip and slide, that Satan may have to rejoice that, instead of smiting the lion, the lion has smitten you, and you are lying at his feet. Oh! keep out of temptation’s way, or invade it armed with the entire panoply of God. Not many of us are called to expose ourselves to it. Keep as far off as you can. You had need be watchful.

But again, knowing how vile we are by nature, knowing, indeed that we are bad enough for anything, let us take another caution. *Boast not, neither in any wise vaunt yourselves*. Presume not to say, “I shall never do this, I shall never do that.” Never venture to ask, with Hazael, “Is thy servant a dog, that he should do this great thing?”

My experience has furnished me with many proofs that the braggart in morality is not the man to be bound for. I would not like to stand security for his virtue. He professed to hate drunkenness, he was certain he never could be intoxicated, and yet he has indulged the vicious taste when his companions have lured him on, and stained the character that he vainly affected.

If not that particular sin, yet there has been some other even more terrible, perhaps, more fatal to the soul, which has smitten that man down to the dust who has dared to vaunt his integrity. He has said, "My mountain stands firm, I shall never be moved," and in that very point where he thought his firmness lay, or in some other which was next-of-kin to it, he has proved his weakness. Lo! the mountain tottered to its base, and was cast into the midst of the sea. There are no men who are in such danger as the men who think they are not in any danger. There are none so likely to sin as those who say they cannot sin.

I remember a story, told me by a dear brother, who is present with us now. A tradesman, who held office in the church, asked him for a loan of money. Though rather inconvenient, he was about to comply, and would have done so had not some such inducement as this been offered, "You know you may safely advance this money to me, for I am incorruptible, I am not young, I am past temptation."

Thereupon, my friend promptly declined, as he did not like the security. The result justified his shrewdness. At that very time, the borrower knew he was on the verge of bankruptcy, and ere long, was actually a bankrupt, and yet he could pretend to say he was above temptation.

Above all, avoid those men who think themselves immaculate, and never fear a fall. If there be a ship on God's sea the captain of which declares that nothing can ever sink her, stand clear, get into the first leaky boat to escape from her, for she will surely founder.

Give a ship the flag of humility, and it is well, but they that spread out the red flag of pride, and boast that they are staunch and trim, and shall never sink, will either strike upon a rock, or founder in the open sea. Pride is the mother of soul-ruin, self-confidence is next door to self-destruction. "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

Boast not, though you be never so strong. Boasting becomes not any mortal. Neither the stature nor the strength of Goliath could furnish a pretext for his arrogance. Goliath never seemed so little as when he said to David, "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh unto the fowls of the air, and to the beasts of the field." Leave your boasting until the battle is done. Do not begin to glory till you have trodden all your enemies beneath your feet. Wait till you have crossed the Jordan, and have reached the shores of the promised land. Do not begin to say, "I am out of gunshot, I am beyond the reach of sin."

"Oh!" saith one, "I have so grown in grace that I cannot sin." Brother, I would not have you think so. "The man after God's own heart" sinned foully. What if you also are after God's own heart, why should you say, "I cannot sin"? Think of Lot—just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked, into what sin he was betrayed. Are you as wise as Solomon? Yet Solomon was an arrant fool. May you not be, in your old age, a fool too? Are you a believer? So was Peter, and yet Peter denied his Master. May not you deny your Master too?

Let the fact that many of God's saints have fallen when they seemed to be the strongest—Moses the meek failed in his temper, Abraham faltered in his faith, patient Job waxed irritable, and so forth—let their example teach you to take heed to yourself, lest you also be tempted and be cast down.

And let this fact, that we do not know our own baseness, *teach us not to be harsh, or too severe, with those of God's people who have inadvertently fallen into sin.* Be severe with their sin, never countenance it, let your actions and your conduct prove that you hate the garment spotted with the flesh, that you abhor the transgression, cannot endure it, and must away with it.

Yet always distinguish between the transgressor and the transgression. Think not that his soul is lost because his feet have slipped. Imagine not that because he has gone astray, he cannot be restored. If there must be a church censure passed upon him, yet take care that you do so act that he, in penitence of spirit, may joyously return. Be you as John was to Peter. Shut not out your fallen brother, for the day may come when men will shut you out, and when you may need all the pity and all the help which

others can give unto you. Distinguish, I say again, between the sin that you do condemn and the sinner whom you must still love—the child of God over whom you must still weep.

Ah, sirs! there may be some of you here, who speak with bitter contempt and scorn of those who, notwithstanding their frailties, are better men than yourselves. God may have suffered some sin to attain a great predominance over them for a season. Perhaps, if all were known, you might be proved to be worse than they, and oh! were the Lord to take His bit from your mouth, and the bridle of His divine providence from your jaws, you might run to greater excesses of riot still.

Who makes you to differ? What have you that you have not received? Say in your soul, “By the grace of God I am what I am,” but stand not up with the self-righteousness of the Pharisee, and say, “God, I thank thee that I am not as other men are.”

Leaving now this point of caution, let us consider, by way of counsel, what positive suggestions may arise. If we be thus depraved, and know not the full extent of our depravity, what then should we do? Surely, *we should daily mourn before God because of this great sinfulness*. Full of sin we are, so let us constantly renew our grief. We have not repented of sin to the full extent, unless we repent of the disposition to sin as well as the actual commission of sin. We should deplore before God, not only what we have done, but that depravity which made us do it.

See how David repents. He does not merely mourn for sin, but he says, “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me.” He makes it a part of his confession, that iniquity was in his inward parts, and that his soul was tainted from birth. So let it be with you, weep over your sinful nature as well as over the development of that nature.

Weep not over the fountain merely, but over the deep spring from which the fountain gushes, not merely over the coin of sin which has been minted into outer acts, but over that base bullion of iniquity which lies un-coined in your heart. Every day expose this, as well as the sins you have committed before God. Lay before God, not merely your crutches, but your lameness, not merely your ceremonial defilement, but the deep leprosy that is in your skin and in your bones. Yes, mourn over it, and beg Him, by His grace, to cleanse you, that you may enter into His kingdom.

And when you have thus done, *take heed that you walk every day very near to God, seeking daily supplies of His grace*. Brethren, I charge you, and specially do I charge myself here, let us look up to God, let us hourly depend upon Him, feeling that yesterday’s grace is of no use whatever for today, that the grace which saved us seven years ago is not the grace that can save us now, but we must have fresh supplies.

There are many, I think, who sit down, and say, “We once knew Christ.” That is not enough, brethren, we must know Christ each day, we must have fresh grace each hour. It is not once to be partaker of the divine nature, but to be daily a partaker of it. Does the tree bear the fruit by the sap of seven years ago? Is it not the sap of this year which will produce the seed of this year’s fruit? And must it not be so with you? Must you not have a daily influx of the divine influences of the Holy Ghost? Must you not receive from Christ each hour that life without which you must droop and die?

O brothers and sisters, let no day pass by without commanding yourselves to God, let no hour be spent without resting under His wing. May our daily habit be to cry unto Him, “Hold thou me up, and I shall be safe.”

My dear hearers, there are some of you who think you are not vile. That is because you have never had your eyes opened to learn your depravity. Let me tell you this, that you are so depraved that unless you be born again, you cannot even see the kingdom of God. You may reform, you may go and seek to make yourselves better, but you cannot do it. Think of the old proverb, “The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.”

Ay, our nature is so base—it is so depraved and so vile—that there must be a radical change of our whole self. How, then, can you change your nature? Can you renew your own heart? God forbid that you should be so vainly infatuated as to imagine it possible! No arm but the eternal arm can make you what you should be. “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard his spots?” Can you make

yourself a new creature in Christ? You cannot create a fly, or a grain of dust, much less can you create within yourself a new heart.

But there is One who can. The Holy Spirit is able, and Jesus Christ is willing to do so. Do you say, “Oh, that He would renew my heart tonight”? I think He has already begun the work, that desire of yours, if sincere, would prove it. Remember that what He bids you to do is to trust Him. If you have longing desires for Him, cast yourself down at His feet and say, “Lord Jesus, Thy salvation is brought nigh to me, I trust in Thee to make known in me this strange, this God-like grace. Work in me the new heart, the divine life, the new nature, save me, save me, Jesus, put my feet in the narrow way, and then guide me all the days of my pilgrimage, and bring me to Thyself, that where you art, in heaven, there I may be with Thee.”

Sinner, He will do it! He will hear your cry, and answer your petition, and you, in the heights of heaven, shall sing of the mercy which received you when you were not worthy to be received, of the love which loved you when you were wholly unlovely, and of all the grace which changed your nature, and made you meet to be a partaker of the inheritance of the saints in light.

God grant that we may not, any of us, be as Hazael was, the perpetrators of crimes of which we never suspected ourselves capable, but rather, feeling that we are men and women of the same kith and kin as the vilest sinners that ever trod this earth, may it be our grateful surprise and our happy lot to be justified freely by God’s grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus! So shall we be numbered with His saints both now and throughout eternity. Amen.

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 KINGS 19

Veres 1-2. *And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I make not your life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time.*

She was too fast in uttering her threat, and it often happens that malice outwits and overleaps itself. If Jezebel meant to kill Elijah, she should not have given him notice that she intended to do it.

3. *And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there.*

He did not feel safe even in the adjoining kingdom, for he fled through Israel, and then went almost the whole length of Judah, right into the wilderness. Note that he “left his servant there,” at Beersheba. Even in his anxiety about himself, he had tender consideration for others, and besides, he wanted complete solitude.

4. *But he himself went a day’s journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers.*

Having presented this passionate and unreasonable prayer, he laid himself down to sleep—the very best thing that he could do under the circumstances.

5-8. *And as he lay and slept under a juniper tree, behold, then an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. And he looked, and, behold, there was a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water at his head. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. And the angel of the LORD came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat: because the journey is too great for thee. And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.*

When he was hungry before, ravens fed him, but now an angel ministers to his wants. God uses all sorts of messengers and means, so that His children may be provided for. This man’s one meal lasted

him through a fast of forty days and forty nights, and dear friend, if God gives not bread to you, He can take away your hunger, so that you have no need to eat and drink.

9. And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there;

There was something congenial about the rugged sides of Horeb, the mount of God, making it a suitable place for a man of Elijah's spirit, the very gloom of the cave gave him some sort of miserable comfort.

9. And, behold, the word of the LORD came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?

“Why hast thou run away?”

10-12. And he said, I have been very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the LORD. And, behold, the LORD passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and broke in pieces the rocks before the LORD, but the LORD was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice.

A mystic whisper, and God was there, as He often is in little things.

13-14. And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entering in of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been very jealous—

He stands to what he had said before, and now repeats his assertion—

14-15. For the LORD God of hosts: because the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria:

It must have been a great comfort to Elijah to have some more work to do. It often takes the mind off very pressing sorrow if one is sent on some new employment.

16-17. And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay.

God heard the prayer that Elijah had prayed against Israel, for it was really a prayer against the people who had forsaken the Lord their God. There are times when men, who are most tender of heart, feel as if they must take God's side against sinners. But the Lord also comforted Elijah with good news:—

18. Yet I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which has not kissed him.

Taken from The Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit C. H. Spurgeon Collection. Only necessary changes have been made, such as correcting spelling errors, some punctuation usage, capitalization of deity pronouns, and minimal updating of a few archaic words. The content is unabridged. Additional Bible-based resources are available at www.spurgeongems.org.